



Opening Statement
Hearing on Federal Lands, Recreation, Natural Resources and Water Infrastructure
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
March 21, 2017

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order.

We are here to continue our discussion of infrastructure—and today, we are focusing on infrastructure that is beneficial to our federal lands and waters and the people and communities that rely on them.

Infrastructure in this context means everything from trails for hikers and bikers, to sawmills and biomass facilities to process timber and slash from overgrown, fire-prone federal forests.

It means water projects to control floods, deliver water to communities, and store water to protect against drought—something on all of our minds here in the midst of Water Week 2017.

It means mineral development, as federal lands can provide everything from the sand and gravel for roads and trails to the rare earths and other metals found in solar panels, electric vehicles, and countless other technologies.

And it means the infrastructure on our federal lands that is critical to the visitor experience, but that our land management agencies have often failed to maintain according to schedule. The sewer and water systems, the roads, the buildings, the trails that all need work and repair—we call it the deferred maintenance backlog, and it is staggering.

The National Park Service's backlog has now grown to nearly \$12 billion. The Forest Service's backlog is over \$5 billion, and the Bureau of Reclamation has a backlog of over \$3 billion in maintenance needs.

This is significant. And we shouldn't kid ourselves—the backlog will take real dollars to resolve. But whether we are talking about aging infrastructure on federal lands, or looking to build something new to respond to a community need or visitor demand, Congressional appropriations alone are not going to be enough.

So what do we do? This is where you have asked to join us this morning. Leveraging private dollars and capacity through public-private partnerships is absolutely necessary in these tough

budget times and can be a “win-win” for both the federal government and rural regional economies.

We should also remember that infrastructure is not *just* a matter of dollars—it’s also about cutting the regulatory red tape that often holds projects back and adds to their costs. We have seen the need for this in mining, water projects, community-supported forest thinning projects, timber sales, and new recreation uses. Just about everywhere, in other words. And the takeaway is that navigating the current maze of congressional statutes, federal regulations, administrative directives, executive orders, secretarial memos, and court decisions is a minefield not for the faint at heart.

We need to do better. We owe it to our western and rural communities, and the people who live near and depend on federal lands for their livelihoods, to do better. And we need to do better for the next generation, so they, too, can experience the world-class outdoor recreation system that generations before them have enjoyed.

As I said last week, our committee has already begun to address the infrastructure challenges within our jurisdiction, through our bipartisan energy bill that Senator Cantwell and I lead on last year, our wildfire and forest management discussion draft, and other legislation.

We will build on that work through our infrastructure hearings. And when Congress is ready to consider an infrastructure package, our committee will be ready to make a serious contribution to it.

This is an important subject, and I thank our witnesses for being here to discuss it with us. Senator Cantwell, I’ll now turn to you for your opening remarks.

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